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Have We Weakened the True Meaning of Christmas?

Moderator, GUNNAR BACK

S p e a k e r s

MARYNIA FARNHAM

WALTER HOVING

JAMES MURRAY, JR.



—COMING—

—December 23, 1952—

**Has Creativeness in American
Literature Declined?**

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THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

DR. MARYNIA FARNHAM—Psychiatrist and author. Dr. Farnham was born in Minnesota in 1899. She was educated at Bryn Mawr College and the University of Minnesota Medical School, did graduate work at Children's Hospital in Boston, and continued to study in London and Vienna from 1930-33. Returning to this country she made an analysis and special report on maternal mortality in New York. Under the Temporary Relief Administration she received an appointment as New York State Director of the Child Health Unit as well as Associate Director of Medical Care. She also made a special investigation and report on the Florida State Hospital under the Florida Department of Welfare and Federal Emergency Administration.

From 1936 to the present, Dr. Farnham has been engaged in private psychiatric practice. At the same time she is supervisor of out-patients at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Hospital. Dr. Farnham is co-author with Ferdinand Lundberg of *Modern Woman: the Lost Sex*, (Harper and Brothers, 1947) and *The Adolescent* (Harper and Brothers, 1951). She is a widow with two children.

JAMES F. MURRAY, JR.—Attorney, author and lecturer. Mr. Murray was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1919 and received his education at St. Peter's College (A. B.), Fordham University Graduate School of Law (LL. B.) and Fordham University Graduate School (M. A.). During World War II he was a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserve and saw fifty-three months of active duty, which included the invasion campaigns of Africa, Sicily, Anzio and Salerno.

In early 1946, Mr. Murray was appointed assistant naval advisor to the United States Deputy, James Dunn, at the London Deputy Foreign Ministers Council. Following this he was named assistant naval advisor to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes at the Council of Foreign Ministers Conference in Paris, preparing the Treaties of Peace with Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania. During this period he engaged in several special missions to Greece, Sweden, the Netherlands and the Nuremberg Trials. Since the end of the war he has made numerous visits to Europe and elsewhere in his professional capacity. He has been in frequent contact with political,

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Have We Weakened the True Meaning of Christmas?

Moderator Back:

Good evening, friends. America's Town Meeting of the Air tonight is heard from New York, where for so many years Town Hall has been such a familiar name. If you've been hearing today again and again the admonition, only 14 more shopping days until Christmas, if you're beginning to wonder how you'll ever get your Christmas cards bought and addressed in time, if Christmas carols have been dinning in your ears instead of coming gently from quiet places, then I think we have something for you in tonight's Town Meeting subject which is, "Have We Weakened the True Meaning of Christmas?"

If you think the excitement of approaching Yuletide with its carols, its bright lights, its shopping, its prospects of family reunion make up a wonderful time of the year, we also have something for you in tonight's subject. The three people who will be heard tonight, we hope, and they hope so, too, have something to say on the subject of Christmas, its meaning and what has happened to that meaning, if anything serious at all. Dr. Marynia F. Farnham is a practicing psychiatrist who is interested in the formation of our social patterns. She is co-author of the book, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, and author of the book entitled, *The Adolescent*. She has seen her two children through a number of Christmases.

Walter Hoving is president of Bonwit Teller, one of New York's stores of distinction. Mr. Hoving is also Chairman of the Board of the Fifth Avenue Association, made up of a group of many New York

stores on the Avenue, interested as stores are in Christmastime. Mr. Hoving has devoted much time to our social problems too. For example, he is president of the Salvation Army Association of New York City.

Mr. James F. Murray, Jr., is an attorney who served for many months as a navy officer in the last war, who went from combat duty for a time into diplomacy as an adviser in the preparation of the peace treaties. He has seen Christmas in a number of other lands. He has written and lectured on the international problems of the day. I suppose we'd better first find out what you three consider to be the true meaning of Christmas, and after that if we get any agreement, we can debate about whether that meaning has been weakened. Ladies, first. So to you, Dr. Farnham.

Dr. Farnham: Well, I'm afraid I gathered from a few short words we were having before the meeting that my point of view about Christmas is rather unorthodox. But I can assure you it's heartfelt anyway, and the point of Christmas is in the heart, I suppose. I should take the position that, for my part, Christmas seems to me a festival of love, irrespective of form or to whom, and in what direction. Its central point is the love of people for each other.

Narrowing it down still further, my feeling is that it is a festival dedicated to the love of children and all young things, as well as to the needful, the helpless, those troubled and those unhappy, but primarily, it is a festival of familial consolidation, familial love, love for the Child, love for the Christ Child and for

the child in every home, and that if it has its true meaning the extension of that love from the child in the home to all members of the family and outward to all people everywhere we might have achieved something like the true meaning of Christmas. I should state my position clearly first, perhaps, that I believe we *have* debased the true meaning of Christmas, that we have now a festival which bears little relation, if any, to its original meanings and that it bids fair to lose very much of its intensity and real value in the years to come. (*Applause*)

Mr. Back: Thank you very much, Dr. Farnham. And now, Mr. Hoving, your definition of the meaning of Christmas, as you see it.

Mr. Hoving: Well, I think Christmas essentially is a Christian religious festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. I think, of course, it's important for children, but I think also its equally important, perhaps more important, for adults. I think if more adults got the spirit of Christmas we'd make more progress in various ways. I think they excuse themselves, perhaps by feeling that it's only for Christmas and it has to do with toys, things of that sort, instead of really recalling that it's the basic religious festival, the birth of their Lord, in the Christian religion. That's what I think is the real meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Back: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Hoving. It's time now for James Murray, Jr., to tell us what his concept of the true meaning of Christmas is and to raise the question of whether he challenges the two definitions so far.

Mr. Murray: Well, I would say I challenge them in part. I feel that the true meaning of Christmas is a rather obvious fact. His-

torically, of course, Christmas derives from the terms Christ's Mass. It has a deep and traditional religious and spiritual significance to those who believe that Christ's birth signified the arrival of the Savior and the Redeemer, to those who practice active Christianity.

Therefore, its prime meaning in a strictly orthodox sense is a religious and spiritual one, but I feel, too, that there is a broader significance for those who are non-Christians, or perhaps even unaware of these Christian origins, and that is, that in its fullest and broadest sense it is a commemoration of an act and an event of love, of love for everyone, of love which in its origins was love for the Christ Child and which during the centuries has widened and spread into the love for all men of all times and all races and creeds. I am reminded of a quotation of Jacques Maritain, the French philosopher, which maybe hits at the root of my feeling as to this wider meaning attached to Christmas when he describes the essence of the message of Christianity and Christmas itself in that it taught men that *love* is worth more than intelligence. Now, I, of course, don't feel that we have weakened this true meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Back: Thank you very much, Mr. Murray. Dr. Farnham, since I mispronounced your first name, I believe, in the introduction, I'll try again . . .

Dr. Farnham: I'll forgive you.

Mr. Back: Dr. Marynia Farnham, did I detect in your opening remarks that you felt that Christmas is essentially for children, that adults really have no main part in it?

Dr. Farnham: I said that its center was for children, but I think

I made myself specific when I said that the meaning of Christmas centering there to my mind must spurt out to include everyone. It's not a particularly confined form of love, but that in its essence, finally, it is the love of everyone for everyone.

Mr. Back: Now, if I may proceed on this basis that the panel has agreed that the verity of love for a neighbor, love for humankind is one that comes out of Christmas, grows out of Christmas, is renewed at Christmastime, I'd like to now turn to the minority and majority point of view. There are those who say that for a minority, Christmas is practiced in its true religious sense, but for a great majority in these late years that Christmas has become nothing but a period of feasting and a holiday period of pleasure. Dr. Farnham, do you feel that the majority of the people celebrate Christmas as a period of feasting and pleasure?

Dr. Farnham: Well, I don't like this majority and minority business because I don't know any of the statistics on it, but from my observation I should say that it has become now a matter of who can have the most fastest, and the most-est, and all of the time. That it has the most enormous feeling of kind of liberation to your impulses. All the things you haven't allowed yourself to do all year you'll do on Christmas and right straight up to New Year's Eve, and then presumably you take your resolution never to behave that way again and then . . .

Mr. Back: Are you talking about the drinking and fun?

Dr. Farnham: I'm talking about the whole business, including the drinking, yes. I think it's safe to say that along about Wednes-

day of next week it'll be a pretty regular thing to be hauling them home from the office parties and that the whole thing is in action, and that's Christmas. Well, I don't think it is.

Mr. Back: You think, then, that Christmas has been weakened by drink?

Dr. Farnham: Well, Christmas has been weakened by drink, and I sound as if I came from some organization that I don't belong to at all.

Mr. Back: Is it necessarily true of our times that drink has taken that part?

Dr. Farnham: Oh, one of the oldest carols, after all, was, "Here We Come A-Wassailing," and I'm sure they wassailed to good purpose, too. But to change it all into wassailing, to make it into a time when all the rules are relaxed, when nobody has to behave himself like a grown-up seems to me to be singularly inappropriate to this matter of serious purpose.

Mr. Back: Mr. Murray wants to have a word. But, Mr. Murray, before you challenge Dr. Farnham, may I turn the discussion in this direction? Has there been, if there has been a weakening of Christmas and you don't think so, an overemphasis on gift giving and commercialism?

Mr. Murray: Well, perhaps I can tie in the remarks which I had intended to employ in differing from a distinguished lady also on this question of commercialism. If I may take first things first, my position is not to say that attempts have not been made, and will not be made, and are not being deliberately, perhaps, made today to paganize the Christmas symbolism and the Christmas commemoration, which as we, I think, generally agreed in our definitions has a

religious and spiritual origin, at least in its broad sense.

I certainly must say that attempts, and perhaps unwitting attempts, are being made in this direction. But I cannot adopt a defeatist attitude about it. For example, you take the question, well, take the question of drinking. Certainly there is nothing that says the Christmas feast cannot be a merry one, and merely to deny that Christmas today continues to be what it has always been in its essence because some people are libertines is merely to say that nothing will ever be the same because human nature has its weaknesses as well as its strong points.

Certainly all of us oppose excessive drinking, but why not oppose it also on New Year's Eve, when I think, perhaps, it would be a rather more numerous lot dragged past our doors than on Christmas or Christmas night. With respect to the commercialization, you have again another distinction to make. If it is to be assumed that one must commercialize to the extent of excluding all the spiritual or religious significance which we attach to Christmas, then of course I oppose it. But I cannot subscribe to the thesis that we, in the United States, have so pagvanized Christmas that commercialization is the be-all and end-all. I like to feel optimistic, and later on I think I can show, perhaps, some statistics to that effect.

Mr. Back: Mr. Hoving, we haven't heard from you. I was wondering whether you're familiar with such phrases as the gift for the man who is hard to please or the gift for the man who has everything.

Mr. Hoving: Yes, I hear a lot about gifts during this season, Mr. Back. But it seems to me that

we should go a little deeper into this question than just a surface commercialization. Or perhaps some excessive drinking here and there. I'm not sure that there's a great deal of excessive drinking during Christmas. But I feel that Christmas is suffering from the general decline of the moral fabric of the Western world and of the United States. I think that creeping socialism in this country, the corruption in high places and low places has had a great deal to do with every citizen weakening his sense of ethics and his moral fiber. I think that's had the effect on Christmas.

Mr. Back: Dr. Farnham is very anxious to challenge that.

Dr. Farnham: I'm not going to challenge it. I think that I would like to clarify my own position. I don't think Christmas is the only thing that has been undermined by the materialistic philosophy which dominates this country today, by any means. The question at point was, had it undermined Christmas? I'd be glad to talk about the Fourth of July, too. But it's Christmas we're talking about now, and I would invite Mr. Hoving to spend a night in the emergency ward of one of the city hospitals if he doesn't think there's any more drinking on Christmas Eve than at other times of the year. I've been there, and I've seen it, and I think I know.

Now I think the point about it that I want to make is that it is simply our removing our controls, taking them all away, and saying this is the time when we don't have to be responsible, we don't have to think, we don't have to control ourselves, and of all things on such an occasion as Christmas. Whether you take it in its most deeply and most orthodox religious phraseology or in its humanistic

considerations, which are also religious, that demand of man his most careful dedication, his most complete affirmation of himself as a loving human being, capable as a civilized person of controlling himself, wanting to, and there's nothing to say that one can't be merry while controlled.

Mr. Back: Well, Dr. Farnham, I wonder if I could raise this point. What else is man doing which makes him forget the true meaning of Christmas other than . . .

Dr. Farnham: Well, I'm one who thinks that the commercial aspect of Christmas is downright dangerous. It's got so now that almost every tot in the country feels that he has the legitimate right to stand in front of his parents and say, "Well, it's coming and this is what I'm going to get." And very many times . . .

Mr. Hoving: Well, I may not have been in the psychiatric ward of the Bellevue Hospital but I've been down at the Salvation Army and I know that there are a great many children in the city of New York who don't get any presents of any kind at Christmas. Now maybe you do, Doctor, get lots of presents and I do but there are a great many people who don't get any presents.

Dr. Farnham: That's right, but to assume that it's a commercial right to have it and that one can assert that right as a sort of legal right is, I think, having turned it into something that it isn't.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Back, from what's been said so far, I'm inclined to be reminded of a situation in a certain foreign capital where the average American walks down a beautiful street, looks to his right and left and sees glorious windows and marvelous goods on display and therefore concludes that

all is right and all is perfect and all is indeed wealth and glitter in that particular capital, while if he goes, instead, to the right or to the left as little as a block or two he can get a much more balanced picture.

Now that's by way of saying what preceded here these past few moments as giving a very unbalanced picture of the average American reaction and action during Christmas. I disagree strongly, and as I said, I think I can cite some instances to show it. The average American, we're treating now, we must treat not only the average American in our topic, "Have We Weakened the True Meaning of Christmas?" but indeed of the preponderant number of Americans, and I deny that the preponderant number of Americans are willfully, or even unwittingly, weakening the true meaning of Christmas.

If you speak to your clergymen, if you speak to your spiritual leaders, and your laymen interested in religious activities and charitable activities, I'm sure you'll all agree with me that in the past decade church attendance on Christmas, donations—charitable activities of every kind—have increased. I'm speaking of voluntary activities, not those done for publicity. Now the commercialization is a menace, and I agree with you, but I don't think that it has reached the point where we can honestly say that we in America have weakened the true meaning of Christmas. I say the meaning of Christmas is going on and becoming more significant, despite these materialistic attacks.

Dr. Farnham: In other words, you feel that materialism is not a dominant philosophy and is not taking over the general control of our morals, and I feel that it is.

Mr. Murray: Well, I feel that materialism is making an attack, but I refuse to agree that we, the American people, are submitting to it. We're not doing it in the political, we're not doing it in the economic, and I don't feel that we're doing it in the religious or spiritual.

Mr. Hoving: Well, I wonder then if you won't agree with me from a cold statistical standpoint that people then must be getting stingy, because there was a time when they would tithe, the people would give 10 per cent of their income to the church or to charitable purposes, and the statistics indicate that the American public gives only two or three per cent of its income nowadays to charitable purposes.

Mr. Murray: Well, I don't think there were income taxes or other such . . .

Mr. Hoving: Well, they get a deduction on those things, up to 15 per cent of their income, but they still give only two or three per cent to charity. So there's lots of room to give more.

Mr. Murray: I'm reminded of the old adage. We're talking a great deal about giving, and giving being the ruling rod, and the measure, and it brings to mind the old quotation, "The gift without the giver is bare." To me Christmas need not have any gifts at all if it have the gift of love, which is an intangible thing. Then the true meaning of Christmas is still there, and the fact that commercialization exists in the larger centers, perhaps to a disagreeable degree, I don't think at all has weakened for America at large the true meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Hoving: Commercialization meaning what? Do you mean giving gifts?

Mr. Murray: No, by commercialization I . . .

Mr. Hoving: Actually the gifts that are bought by the American public don't amount to the liquor that they drink during that same week.

Mr. Back: Now we're back to . . .

Mr. Murray: May I answer that question? I'll do it briefly. I feel that commercialization would be where the actual giving and buying, and all that goes with it, becomes the end rather than the means. I say that as long as giving a gift is a means toward the expression of the true significance of Christmas then there's nothing to worry about. And I feel that's the position it holds today.

Dr. Farnham: Do you really believe that the feeling of competition doesn't enter into this, the anxiety lest you might get a gift which: was either not as good as the one you gave, or was better than the one you gave? These are two tragedies which everyone must meet on Christmas morning. Either one is horrifying.

Mr. Murray: I refuse to accept that generalization. Perhaps we have different sets of friends, but as far as I can see . . .

Dr. Farnham: And you don't approve of mine.

Mr. Murray: I don't think that the spirit of commercialization whereby the commercializing of Christmas has become Christmas rather than Christmas itself being Christmas, I'm certainly not going to agree that that has taken over.

Mr. Back: Mr. Hoving, may I go back to something I suggested earlier? A very well-known clergyman in Washington suggests that to appeal to people to buy the gift for the man who is hard to please, or the

man who has everything, is an indication that we have forgotten about Christmas. The man who is hard to please or the man who has everything, really should you buy him a gift, is it necessary, are you driven to it? What do you think?

Mr. Hoving: Well, it all depends on the store he goes to buy the gift in, obviously. If he goes to the right store, then it's a cinch to solve the problem. Don't forget that a gift is not only a benefit to the receiver but it's of even more benefit to the giver. And even if this thing is a chore, and a great many people feel badly about the hard work they've got to go through in buying presents and doing them up and so on, it still does them some good, because most of them never give a thing to anybody the rest of the year.

Dr. Farnham: Isn't that exactly the difficulty? They think they've paid off with a package for the actual demand to love people the year around.

Mr. Murray: Well, Dr. Farnham mentioned before that she didn't have any statistics, that she wasn't going to be maneuvered into the position of being a statistician, and yet I feel that her last remark places upon her shoulders that responsibility. I've been across the country many times at Christmas and perhaps many of you have, and I just cannot submit to the fact that the average American would not feel it were Christmas were all this commercialization not a part of it.

I still strongly submit to you that the average American, and indeed the preponderant number of Americans are impressed, and increasingly so, with the religious origin of Christmas, the religious and spiritual significance of it, either dogmatically or in a broader sense, and that the commercializa-

tion is rather a means towards an end, rather than the end instead of the means. I think we're looking through the wrong end of the telescope if we lose sight of that fact.

Mr. Back: May I submit this? In talking to people on this subject before tonight, I heard such things, "There's an overemphasis on the Christmas Card," and that's one of the things that's weakening Christmas; "There's a degrading of the Christmas Carol," because it's blared at you in every store, you don't hear it in the proper setting; "There has been a weakening of Christmas because of a sort of debasement of Santa Claus," because you see him now on every street corner. Now those were questions that were raised. I don't offer them as my opinions, I just throw them out to the panel for anybody who wishes . . .

Mr. Murray: Could that be blamed on the American people? With all due respect to the advertising profession, many of whom are my dearest friends and clients, I may add, is it not rather their fault than the fault of the American people? As you put it, these things are blared at us—we're not blaring them. We're subjected to them; and I think if the American people get up on their hind legs, as parenthetically I am convinced they are doing, the probability or possibility of this menace continuing will be very strictly limited. I have the feeling that we are getting back more and more each year to the basic reason and significance of Christmas.

Dr. Farnham: I take it from what Mr. Murray says—he calls this a menace — so I take it he agrees that it is.

Mr. Murray: Oh, I certainly do.

Dr. Farnham: But one libel on the American people I should not

like to go along with, and that is that they can have anything put over on them that they don't want; and if the advertising brothers are doing this to them, then I am very much surprised they're letting it happen.

Mr. Murray: Well, you're the one who said it's been put over on them. I'm denying it.

Dr. Farnham: I didn't use the word put over. I say that if there is a Santa Claus on every corner, somebody's letting it happen; and Santa Claus is on every corner and it's very confusing to children who think there is Santa Claus. Like the little boy in the recent cartoon who's sitting in front of a television set, and there is Santa Claus and in the door comes Papa dressed as Santa Claus. The child's having a nervous breakdown in front of your eyes, of course. How many can you have?

Mr. Hoving: I still think that we're confining ourselves exclusively to the superficial aspects of the question and overlooking the basic degeneration of the American moral fiber due to the things that I mentioned before—the constant evidence of corruption, the socialization, and all of those things. Those are the things that are threatening us. Why should we confine ourselves even to a man who drinks a little too much one night a year? It seems to me that he can get over that, but he isn't going to get over this other thing which is undermining his basic spirituality.

Dr. Farnham: From what you're talking about there, I would agree—about the underlying causes. The symptomology is, nevertheless, as we described it. The underlying causes certainly must lie in some debasement of moral strength . . .

Mr. Murray: As long as I don't have to drink symptomology for Christmas, that's all right.

Mr. Back: Now, Mr. Murray would you care to make a comment on that before we . . .

Mr. Murray: Yes, I would agree that the menace, the terms, the frame of reference of the menace obviously is materialism. Some people call it paganism. It reaches its political zenith, or nadir, as you will, in the atheistic, the communistic materialism which we are confronting on a military and diplomatic basis. My thesis is . . .

Mr. Hoving: At home as well, don't forget.

Mr. Murray: To a degree at home, yes. My thesis, however, is simply that the American people themselves have not been sold this bill of goods, and they have not weakened the meaning of Christmas. We are resisting these materialistic invasions.

Mr. Hoving: I hope you're right.

Mr. Back: Thank you, Mr. Murray, and the rest of the panel. Each week on Town Meeting we ask our speakers to answer a question which has been submitted in advance by a listener. We feel that this gives everybody throughout the country a chance to participate directly in Town Meeting. Because we think participation by our listeners is so important, our next week's program will be devoted completely to questions sent in by listeners. War correspondents in Korea and Tokyo will answer the questions. But this week Mrs. V. E. Artman of Route 2, Sunset Avenue, Canton, Ohio, will receive a set of the American People's Encyclopedia for submitting for you tonight the following question: "How can parents of modest means combat the terrific pressure to buy, which all advertising media exert

on them and their children at Christmas time?"

Dr. Farnham: Well, I think the best way to resist is to resist, and to make it stick is another thing. The parent who devotes himself to his children during the year, and who gives them the kind of love and assurance and security and support the whole year long, is not going to have to buy his way out at Christmas, even if the Joneses do get an automobile that actually runs. The problem is to see to it that you're a parent all the year round in the real sense of the word, and you will not feel guilty or disturbed nor will your children be upset, if you must face them clearly with the fact that they will have what you can give, and what you think is good and proper in terms of the family means.

Mr. Back: Mr. Hoving, what is your answer to that question?

Mr. Hoving: I think that very question illustrates some of the points I've been trying to make. If people are so at sea as to how to resist such a situation, it indicates to me that they have never heard of how to develop character. The

development of character was one of the basic things in the founding of the United States and this whole Western world, and that's why we were strong, and that's why we have gone where we have gone; and now when we are sitting back and are worried as to how we can resist the sales talk of somebody and buying more than we can afford because our children seem to be crying for it, it indicates that we have forgotten the basic idea of Christian Character.

Mr. Murray: I think that the basic problem is not at all as complicated as it might sound. How to resist this pressure is just another way of saying, "How can we prevent the essentially religious and spiritual aspects of Christmas from being paganized or neo-paganized?" I think the answer is simple. The parents must first and always remember that the children have to be taught from the earliest possible age the real significance of Christmas; and that giving gifts is fine but if the spirit is lacking or the motives are wrong, it's better not to give them at all. In that way and in that character, I think it can be resisted.



QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

Mr. Back: We come now to this period in our broadcast when you members of the panel will really have to work because the audience now has questions for you. We're going to begin asking questions of our New York audience with a question which comes from this gentleman in the leather coat, and believe it's addressed to Dr. Farnham.

Man: Dr. Farnham, do you think the true meaning of Christmas has been weakened by having the

youth's beliefs stressed on Santa Claus rather than the Christ story?

Dr. Farnham: Well, I think Santa Claus is a pretty shabby invention altogether and had at one time some certain merit as a pretty myth, but it never gave Christmas any great strength; it only gave it a kind of decorative merriment, and the emphasis on Santa Claus takes it off the central point of Christmas. However, could Santa Claus be resumed in his old guise as a charming saint

who attended upon children at Christmas time—and in those days only if they were good children—he would probably be a harmless fellow altogether and not do much damage to Christmas one way or the other.

Mr. Back: Mr. Murray, you looked up toward the ceiling on that.

Mr. Murray: Well, I want to take issue here on the question of the Santa Claus legend being a myth. There is good historical validity to the fact that Saint Nicholas did exist. He was a bishop of Bari, in Italy. But the point that I'm driving at is that if the myth or the historical fact be viewed in its true proportions today, the giving which characterized his life could be translated into giving in our own life, and I would find nothing harmful about it even in terms of our modern Santa Claus with the beard instead of the Papal Cross.

Mr. Back: We have to give Mr. Hoving a chance.

Mr. Hoving: This time I really enjoy taking exception to what the doctor says, because I think that Santa Claus is a gay old gentleman; and I think he's having fun; and I think he gives both children and adults fun. Now why take that out of the whole thing? After all, joy is very much part of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Mr. Back: Thank you very much, Mr. Hoving. The next question comes from this lady to my left.

Lady: Mr. Hoving, should the secular observance of Christmas by non-Christians be encouraged or discouraged.

Mr. Hoving: I see no reason why it shouldn't be encouraged. It seems to me it's a very fine thing.

Mr. Back: The next question comes from this lady here, please.

Lady: Mr. Murray, is it not a heartening trend for Americans to agree to forego gifts mutually, and join in gifts to the less fortunate in organized ways?

Mr. Murray: Yes, I think there is a very heartening trend in that direction, and that was one of the features I alluded to when I said that I refused to accept a defeatist attitude, and I feel positively and optimistically that we have not and are not weakening the true meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Back: In what respect have you discovered, Mr. Murray, that there is a trend toward giving in that way?

Mr. Murray: Well, to cite just a few instances that have come to my own personal attention certainly families of—well, I won't say well-to-do—middle class Americans have taken younger children in addition to or supplementary to their own giving, have shown them that perhaps a sacrifice gift to "Care" or other charitable organizations, where little children will benefit whom none of them know is more in tune with the real Christmas. Then churches and civic organizations are doing the same. I have statistics—I won't bring them out now—but I think it's definitely increasing and it's encouraging.

Mr. Back: Thank you, Mr. Murray. The next question is for Mr. Hoving, I believe.

Man: Mr. Hoving, isn't it a fact that tin-pan-alley songs of today are taking the place of the religious Christmas carols?

Mr. Hoving: I don't know just what the statistics on that are, but it seems to me that we hear a great many tin-pan-alley songs, but we also seem to hear some religious songs and spirituals.

Mr. Back: I take it then, Mr. Hoving, you don't believe that they're heard enough, such as All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth, to depreciate the carol.

Mr. Hoving: I'm not in a position to evaluate that.

Mr. Murray: I think one point on that might be to remind the questioner that the tin-pan-alley songs endure about one or two years, particularly if they do harm to the real meaning of Christmas; whereas the old carols endure for centuries, because they're in conformity with the real meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Back: And now for the next question, this big gentleman here.

Man: Mr. Hoving, do you imply that the true meaning of Christmas supports free enterprise and not socialism, or does it transcend and judge both systems?

Mr. Hoving: Well, I think that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is based upon individual responsibility, responsibility to God and responsibility to yourself and to the social fabric. Socialism, on the other hand, is not responsible to the individual but transfers all of that to the group, to the government, and when that's done it's destructive of character. You cannot build character on any basis except through individual responsibility, which is the Christian tradition, and for that reason I feel that socialism and Christianity are completely antithetical.

Mr. Back: Mr. Murray, do you want to make a comment on that reply by Mr. Hoving?

Mr. Murray: My own feeling is of course that his use of socialism there requires a very stringent definition which I didn't hear, and if it were defined more carefully it would be easier to comment on,

but the all-embracing term, socialism, I think is dangerous to employ today. We could get into quite an argument about that.

Mr. Back: Thank you, Mr. Murray. Our last questioner has another question, I believe a follow-up for you, Mr. Hoving.

Man: Well, I think we have weakened the true meaning of Christmas if we use Christianity to support an economic system, and don't say that it transcends and judges any economic system.

Mr. Hoving: I don't think that we use Christianity to support an economic system one way or the other, no.

Man: I believe you have, in your answer.

Dr. Farnham: Well, I think the gentleman, I can see his point, that your statement that socialism as a broad, embracing term, as Mr. Murray pointed out, is inconsistent with, and absolutely opposed to, the true meaning of Christmas. And that, as Mr. Murray said, requires some definition of what you mean by socialism.

Mr. Hoving: If by socialism we mean atheistic materialism, then the answer is yes. If not, then I would say that Christianity certainly transcends all economic forms and all government forms. Obviously it's a historical fact.

Mr. Back: Thank you very much. I think we're ready for the next question for you, I believe, Mr. Murray.

Man: In getting back to music, don't you think, Mr. Murray, that such a song as Daddy Caught Mummy Kissing Santa Claus Last Night is overdoing it just a bit?

Mr. Murray: I would say it depends on the mood in which the song is sung.

Dr. Farnham: Well, it's at least extraordinarily vulgar, isn't it?

Mr. Murray: I'm not acquainted with the song, frankly.

Dr. Farnham: Happily.

Mr. Murray: Happily, then.

Mr. Back: Does that answer your question? All right we'll turn now to this young lady.

Lady: Mr. Hoving, aren't stores guilty of extending Christmas to a point where everyone becomes sick of the outward manifestations of it?

Mr. Hoving: I don't think so. As I said before, I feel that so few Christmas gifts are actually given by people—really so pathetically few—and people drink more liquor and spend more money on liquor during the week between Christmas and New Year's than they do on Christmas presents, so I don't know how we can make a case on the basis that people are spending too much money for Christmas gifts.

Mr. Back: Thank you, Mr. Hoving. The next question comes from this tall gentleman.

Man: Mr. Murray, do you think Christmas carols should be sung in the public schools?

Mr. Murray: I think it's a rather nice idea, yes.

Mr. Back: All right. The next question please.

Lady: Dr. Farnham, if you think we have lost the true meaning of Christmas, how do you think we can start to get it back? Right away, I mean.

Dr. Farnham: I suppose that's a question for all of the speakers to contribute to, but my own feeling would be to start it right in the home, and for parents to attempt to rear their children without the perpetual keeping up with the Joneses, the perpetual holding before them the idea of giving that goes with Christmas, and a con-

solidating of the whole enterprise of Christmas in the home, with a much more sober view of the entire enterprise.

Mr. Hoving: Well, I think that that is part and parcel of the fact that the objective of Christianity is mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity; and I think that if we were to rededicate ourselves to that objective in our education and in our training in the home and so on, we would then gradually get back, in my opinion, to a truer meaning of Christmas.

Mr. Murray: Well, of course, I don't agree that we have lost the true meaning of Christmas, but I have said that a menace to its true meaning certainly exists. My own feeling is that the best way to repel that menace is to remember, and remind our children as well, that Christmas essentially is a holy day and not a holiday; that it celebrates the birth of Christ and that anything not in conformity, or should I say that does violence to that concept, should be kept out of the celebration. That way I think we can keep it on the level that it should enjoy.

Mr. Hoving: May I interject? I firmly believe that you begin with the children, and I'm very much concerned, as one who has two young children myself, about the problem of how to teach the child to be willing to give in a sense of not expecting any return, in a sense of contributing to the spirit of Christmas, which is love for one's neighbor whether he lives here or many miles away. What specifically do we do to teach the child that?

Mr. Murray: Must a child be taught that in order to love his neighbor he must give in terms of material giving? For example a child may be taught to make little

sacrifices; a child may be taught in any opinion, I'm speaking only for myself, I think in this country, in this day and age, the best way for a child to understand the essence of Christmas as such is to be taught love and tolerance for those who perhaps are different from him. If we can begin on that premise where a child will be taught love in the spiritual sense, he will be conforming to the true significance of Christmas whether he realizes it or not. And then later, as he matures, the giving without expecting a gift in return might be somewhat easier.

Mr. Back: Dr. Farnham, as a psychiatrist, what is your answer to the question I raised?

Dr. Farnham: I think that if the child is reared in a secure and happy home where he is loved, he will automatically want to give. You don't have to teach people to give; they will learn to give if they are given *enough* in terms of actual

love. Very many parents of course want to follow the idea that material giving will take the place of loving, which is much harder. It's much easier, really, to answer material needs than it is to answer the emotional needs of children. If their emotional needs are answered, they will be giving people, and they will give both of themselves and materially as far as they can.

Mr. Murray: Might I just as an afterthought say that, of course, example is always the best form of teaching children, and rather than blame our children for not responding, perhaps we ought to blame ourselves for not teaching them a little better by our own example what love and giving really mean.

Mr. Back: Thank you, very much, Mr. Murray, Dr. Farnham and Mr. Hoving for your discussion of tonight's topic. So plan to be with us next week and every week at the sound of the Crier's bell.



THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

(Continued from Page 2)

diplomatic and military leaders of western nations. In 1948 he was seized and held as a "spy" by the Soviets in the Russian zone of Vienna.

WALTER HOVING—Chairman of the Board of the Fifth Avenue Association and President of Bonwit Teller. Walter Hoving's business career is a typical American story. A graduate of Brown University ('20), his first step into the merchandising field was taken when he joined the staff of R. H. Macy and Company and became one of its Vice Presidents in 1928. In 1932 he joined Montgomery Ward as a Vice President, Director, and General Sales Manager. During his four years with Montgomery Ward the typically old-fashioned mail order catalog was completely rejuvenated, resulting in a phenomenal rise in the company's sales. In 1936 Mr. Hoving joined Lord and Taylor in New York as President. Under his aegis, Lord and Taylor modernized both their physical plant and their executive staff. He planned the expansion of suburban stores. After ten years with Lord and Taylor Mr. Hoving formed his own company, the Hoving Corporation, which subsequently purchased Bonwit Teller. During his regime Bonwit Teller has expanded with large units in Boston, Cleveland and Chicago, and the entire New York store has been modernized and redecorated.

Mr. Hoving was one of the founders of the USO and its first president during the war. He also was one of the founders of the Salvation Army Association of New York and its President since 1940. Mr. Hoving's most recent work is well known to New Yorkers. As chairman of the Anti-Sales Tax Committee he has waged vigorous war against increased taxation in the City of New York.

Moderator—GUNNAR BACK—Member of the ABC network's Washington news staff.

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